

The Primary History of Armenia

or

History of the Ancestors

**Translated from Classical Armenian
by Robert Bedrosian**

Sources of the Armenian Tradition (Long Branch, New Jersey, 2004)

Translator's Preface

[i] The short work known as the *Primary History of Armenia* (or *History of the Ancestors*), describes the earliest legendary history of the Armenians. The *History* contains six sections or chapters (three narrative episodes and three chronological sections) which may not be the work of a single author. Taken together, they do not form a cohesive structure. The first chapter recounts the *gestes* of Hayk, eponymous ancestor of the Armenian (*Hay*) people. Included are the stories of Hayk's departure from Babylon; his successful rebellion against the Babylonian tyrant, Bel; his settlement on the Armenian highlands; as well as an account of the life, death, and "resurrection" of his descendant, Ara the Handsome. Chapter two describes the rise of the Arsacids in Iran and the establishment of the Arsacid dynasty in Armenia. Another writer or editor, in our opinion, added the final two paragraphs of this chapter, which are historically inaccurate listings of the rulers of the Parthians (from "Arshak" to Artawan (d. A.D. 227) and the rulers of the Armenians (to King Pap, 367-c. 374). The third chapter is a short "chronological" section deriving from later authors. It seems to have been inserted, unsuccessfully, as a bridge. Chapter four is an account of the origin of the Mamikonean House, which is missing some beginning lines or paragraphs. Chapters five and six contain historically inaccurate tables of the rulers of the Byzantines and Persians, ending with the last Sasanian *shah*, Yazdgird III (632-651). The "chronological" sections of the *Primary History*, chapters three, five, and six, are not translated here.

An editor's hand seems visible at the very beginning of the work. This editor, writing in an obtuse style, gives a confused statement of his purpose and intentions. He cites his sources in a much-debated passage, invoking a mysterious figure named Mar Abas as well as some unlikely foreign archival material. Here the editor is trying to explain where the legends which follow came from, but the explanation is not convincing. Nor are modern translations of the opening paragraphs (including our own) particularly clear or satisfying. The legends themselves are written in a spare and direct style, quite unlike the opening paragraphs. It seems probable that the editor, or another compiler, tried to unite some fragmentary writings he had at hand, perhaps adding some of the chronological sections himself.

[ii] The six sections were first published by T. Mihrdatian in 1851 in Constantinople as the first six chapters of a larger work that follows it, the *History of Sebeos*, which is a narrative history of Armenia in the seventh century. What Mihrdatian's exemplar actually looked like is debated, while the original manuscript it was based on has

since been lost. However, Mihrdatian himself is believed to have divided the work into chapters, numbered them, and inserted chapter summaries on his own. Already by 1862 the philologist K. Patkanean had questioned whether the initial chapters really belonged with Sebeos' *History*. Thus began an ongoing debate about these six originally untitled and incomplete writings, which came to be known as the *Primary History*, the *History of the Ancestors*, or the *Anonymous of Sebeos*. While few Armenists today believe that the *Primary History* and Sebeos' *History* are the work of the same author, nonetheless, by convention, the episodes and tables of the *Primary History* continue to be published as the first six chapters of Sebeos. For more on the manuscript tradition see the *Translator's Preface* to [Sebeos' History](#).

The oldest legendary material preserved in the *Primary History* long predates the current era and seems to be describing events of the first millennium B.C. When this material was put into writing is another matter. The story of Mar Abas and the foreign archives, though unlikely in the precise detail presented, may generally be correct in suggesting that some of the material was written in foreign languages, predating the creation of the Armenian alphabet and the beginnings of writing in Armenian in the early fifth century A.D. These particular legends probably were known to fifth-century writers in some form, either as ballads sung by minstrels (*gusans*), or in written form. The same legends are told with some differences in another Armenian source, the *History of the Armenians* by Movses Xorenats'i, but it is not certain that Movses used the *Primary History* directly. Even if Movses did use the work directly, it still does not help with a precise dating. This is because Movses' own *History* probably first appeared in the eighth century, although it contains some tantalizing portions that seem to be much earlier. Nor does the fact that the *Primary History* has come down to us attached to a seventh-century work necessarily mean that it was written in that century. The question of the dating of the sections of the *Primary History* cannot be resolved at present, based on existing Armenian sources.

This translation was made from G. V. Abgaryan's critical edition of Sebeos [*Patmut'iwn Sebe'osi* (Erevan, 1979)]. An earlier English translation, by R. W. Thomson, appeared in 1978 as an appendix to his *Moses Khorenats'i History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978) pp. 357-368.

The transliteration used here is a modification of the Library of Congress system for online Armenian, substituting **x** for the LOC's **kh**, for the thirteenth character of the Armenian alphabet (խ). Otherwise we follow the LOC transliteration, which eliminates diacritical marks above or below a character, and substitutes single or double quotation marks to the character's right. In the LOC romanization, the seventh character of the alphabet (ե) appears as **e'**, the eighth (ը) as **e''**, the twenty-eighth (ռ) as **r'**, and the thirty-eighth (օ), as **o'**.

Robert Bedrosian
Long Branch, New Jersey 2004

A Note on Pagination

The printed editions of these online texts show the page number at the top of the page. In the right margin the pagination of the Classical Armenian (*grabar*) text also is provided. We have made the following alterations for the online texts: the page number of the printed English editions (*Sources of the Armenian Tradition* series) appears in square brackets, in the text. For example [101] this text would be located on page 101, and [102] this text would be on page 102. The *grabar* pagination is as follows. This sentence corresponds to the information found on page 91 of the Classical Armenian text [g91] and what follows is on page 92. In other words, the Classical Armenian text delimiters [gnn] indicate **bottom** of page.

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Chapter 1.

[1] There was no willful desire [for me], a skilled investigator, to undertake to write a composition recalling unrecorded times, the ancient braves and their legends. I shall tell of what happened subsequently and briefly describe the years and days of the old kings, recalling [their] connection to the disasters of the present time.

For that [*i.e.*, the most ancient parts] we [should] look to the writings of the philosopher Mar Abas of Mtsurn, [containing information] which he found written on a monument in the city of Mtsurn at the court of King Sanatruk, opposite the door of the royal palace, covered by the ruins of the royal dwelling.

The columns of the [ruined] palace had been requested by the Persian king's court. Excavating the ruin for the columns, they found an inscription there engraved on rock [listing] the years and days of the old kings of the Armenians and Parthians, in Greek writing. When I discovered [the contents of the inscription] in Mesopotamia from his students, I wanted to describe it to you. It had the following title:

I, Agat'angeghos, the scribe, wrote upon this monument with my own hand the years of the first kings of the Armenians, by order of brave Trdat, taking [the information] from the royal *diwan*.

You will see the transcription of this shortly and in its [appropriate] place [g47].

First I shall begin to describe tales [concerning] the awesome king and brave man, the history of the ancestors from whom the entire country was settled; then, added to these, tales about the giants and vain fables about inept troops which conceived and gave birth to the Tower, and then were dispersed throughout the great, countless uninhabited places where [previously] no voice had penetrated. Titans were ceaselessly putting each other to the sword; [and they were] the first to rule over the world.

Be'l the Titan regarded himself as above all the races of mankind, not recognizing his own nature; rather, he summoned all the races of mankind to his service. Now at that time Hayk, born of Japheth (Abet'), did not want to submit in service to King Be'l, disdaining to call him a god. So Be'l attacked Hayk in battle, but valiant Hayk harassed him with [his] bow.

This is the Hayk who begat his son Aramenak in Babylon. Aramenak begat numerous sons and daughters, the eldest [son being] Aramayis. Aramayis begat many sons and daughters, the eldest being Amasia. Amasia begat many sons and daughters, the eldest being Gegham. Gegham begat many sons and daughters, the eldest being Harma. Harma begat many sons and daughters, the eldest being Aram. Aram begat many sons and daughters, the eldest being Ara the Handsome.

[2] Now these are the names of the men who gave birth to [the Armenian] race who were born in Babylon and went to the northern areas, to the country of Ararat. For Hayk left Babylon with his wife and sons and all their household. He went and settled in the Ararat country in an estate at the foot of a mountain, which previously had been built by Zruan together with his fathers and brothers.

Hayk gave to his grandson Kadmos, Aramenak's son, [this] property in inheritance. Then [Hayk] himself went farther north and settled in the midst of a highland plain which he named Hark', after the name of the Fathers [g48].

The country was called Hayk', appropriately [named] after him, and the people, Haykids [Armenians].

Now this Hayk was very strong and handsome, and an extremely powerful archer and warrior.

At that time the giant Be'l the Titan ruled as king in Babylon, a hunter and grand false god who was extremely powerful and very handsome. He was ruler over all peoples spread across the face of the entire world and he [accomplished] his royal commands over all peoples with the aid of witchcraft. In his boastful pride, [Be'l] erected images of himself and had the country worship him as a god and offer sacrifices.

All peoples immediately implemented his orders, except for a certain [man] named Hayk, the patriarch (*nahapet*) of peoples who did not submit to his service, did not erect [Be'l's] image in his home and did not glorify him as a god.

This man's name was Hayk, and King Be'l conceived a great grudge against him. King Be'l massed troops in Babylon and went against Hayk to kill him.

He reached the country of Ararad and the estate which was their patrimony which had been built at the base of the mountain. Kadmos fled to Hark' to inform his father, saying: "King Be'l is coming against you and has reached the estate there, and so I, with my wife and children have come [to you] as fugitives."

Hayk took Aramenak and his son Kadmos as well as their sons and the sons of their seven daughters, gigantic men but few in number.

Hayk went to fight King Be'l but was unable to confront him because of the multitude of [Be'l's] gigantic armored men.

Now when Hayk struck at King Be'l, Be'l wanted to seize him with his own hands, but Hayk evaded him and fled. In hot pursuit, Be'l went after him with his weapons-bearer.

Hayk halted and asked him: "Why do you pursue me? Return to your own place so that you do not die today at my hands, for my arrow will not miss its mark." Then Be'l replied: "[I pursue you in person] so that you do not fall into the hands of my young men and perish. Instead [g49], give yourself up to me and live in my house in peace, looking after the young hunters in my house."

Hayk answered him, saying: "You are a dog and from a pack of dogs, you and your people. Therefore, today I will empty my quiver at you." The Titan King [Be'l] was armored and trusted in the full armoring of his person.

[3] Hayk, [descendant] of Japheth, advanced closer, holding in his hand a bow which was like a branch of a mighty pine tree, and then he took position against [Be'l] with his bow at the ready. He picked up [the] quiver from the ground by him and [putting an arrow] to the gigantic arc of his bow, drew it back to his shoulder and [released the] arrow [which] forcefully penetrated the armor plating, pierced the bronze shield, passed through the pillar of meat and emerged, falling on the ground. The giant, who thought himself to be a god, immediately fell to the ground and his troops fled. Pursuing them, [Hayk and his troops] took herds of horses, mules and camels from them.

Hayk returned to his own place; and he went and took over the country of Ararad and dwelled there with his clan (*azg*), until now. At the time of his death, he gave his heritable property to his grandson, Katmos, son of Aramenak, brother of Harma. And he ordered Aramenak to go to the northern region where he himself had first dwelled.

After the death of Hayk, Aramenak took his sons and daughters and their husbands, the seven sisters and their husbands, sons, and daughters, with all of their belongings, and went and dwelled there in the first district which

they called Hark', after the name of their father, Hayk'. Then Aramenak went farther north, descending onto a deep plain which is between lofty mountains and which is crossed by a fast-moving river. Crossing this, Aramenak settled there and built up the country of his inheritance, a place of mountains and rocks.

After Aramenak, his son, Aramayis, built his residential dwelling over the river banks and called it Aramayir after his own name. Then his sons began to multiply and fill the country. And they built districts.

Aramayis, too, died and his son, Amasia, took over his country; and after him was Gegham. Gegham died and his son, Harma, ruled, then Harma's son, Aram [ruled]. [Aram's] son was Ara the Handsome, by whose name that very plain was known, Ayrarad [g50].

Shamiram, the wife of Ninos, the king of the Assyrians, heard about his beauty and wanted to have relations with [Ara] to fulfill her desire with prostitution. [This was] because she was extremely aroused by what she had heard and was inflamed by his person and physical beauty, since there was no other man having his striking good looks anywhere. She sent emissaries with offerings to him, calling him to her at Ninue'. But Ara did not accept her offerings, nor did he agree to go to Shamiram in Ninue'. So Shamiram took her troops and went against Hayk. She came and reached the plain of Ara, and made war with Ara, striking [his] troops and killing him in battle.

Shamiram ordered that his body be taken to the roof of her palace and said: "I will tell the gods to lick his wounds and bring him back to life."

But when his corpse began to decay, she secretly ordered that it be thrown into a pit and covered up. She then adorned one of her lovers, a man who was an appropriate [substitute], and then noised it about that Ara had been licked by the gods and had resurrected. She kept [the double] hidden and did not show him to anyone who knew him. Thus did Queen Shamiram cause the story of the [mythological creatures called] *aralezk'* to be spread about.

[4] Then Shamiram ruled over the country of the Armenians and from that time the kings of Assyria ruled [over Armenia] until the death of Senek'arim, when they rebelled from service to the kings of Assyria.

Zareh, son of the sons of Aramenak, ruled over them; he was a powerful man and able with the bow. Then Armog [ruled the Armenians], then Sarhang, then Shawash, followed by P'ar'awaz.

[P'ar'awaz] begat Bagam and Bagarat. And Bagarat begat Biwrat who begat Aspat. The sons of Bagarat had their inheritance in the western parts, namely Angeghtun, for Bagarat was called Angegh which in that period, the nation of barbarians styled god.

This P'ar'awaz was obedient to King Nabugodonosor in Babylon. From that time on, the kings of the Babylonians and the Mark' [Medes] ruled [over the Armenians] until Alexander the Macedonian, who put the entire world into his service.

And [the Armenians] served the Macedonians until the uprising of the Parthians against the Macedonians [g51] and the rise of the Arsacid kingship. This is what [the text] before me by the same chronicler [?Mar Abas] narrates.

They say that Abraham's adopted son, Marseak, left Damascus, fleeing from Isaac; and he came and settled by the foot of two mountains which face the great plain of Ara, the peak of Aragats and Gegh mountain.

He named the mountain after himself; thus they call the mountain Azat. [Marseak] had three sons [one of whom was] P'ar'ox, who is Eliazar. They named the place of their habitation P'ar'oxt, and named the plain of their hunts and horse races P'ar'akan; and they mixed with the clan of Aramenak.

Chapter 2.

The uprising of the Parthians which took place in this period.

After the death of Alexander, emperor of the Macedonians, the Parthians served the Macedonians for 61 years. For [the following individuals] ruled: Seleucid Nikanor in Babylon for 32 years, Antiochus Soter, 19 years, and Antiochus Theos for 10 years.

In the eleventh year of King Antiochus, the Parthians rebelled from service to the Macedonians. And Arshak the Great, son of the king of the T'e'talats'ik' ruled in Bahl Shahastan, the country of the Kushans, and all the peoples of the east and north served him.

King Arshak with all his troops went from the east to Babylon, the property of the first kings, so that he could establish his kingship there. He arrived in Babylon.

Now when Antiochus saw that Arshak, king of the Parthians, had come against him with such a multitude, he thereafter was unable to trust in the great numbers of his troops to resist that fierce man, and so he fled from him, going to Asiastan. He ruled over Asiastan for five years. Then, one after the other, for a certain period, Macedonians ruled in Asiastan. King Arshak [g52] subjugated Asorestan, which [had been] under Antiochus, as well as the Babylonians, Persians, and Medes and the country of the Armenians as far as the great Mount Kapkoh and as far as the shore of the great Western Sea. Arshak ruled in Babylon for many years.

[5] In the one hundred fourteenth year of Arshak, king of the Parthians, [which was] in the fourth year of Demetrius' kingship over Asiastan and the Syrians, when King Arshak had gone to the east, Demetrius massed troops and went and captured Babylon.

Demetrios, seeing what a multitude Arshak brought against him, gave way and went as far as Antioch. There he fought a war against Arshak. By the city of Antioch a great battle occurred. [Arshak's troops] struck and destroyed Demetrius' troops and arrested Demetrius. King Arshak bound [Demetrius] hand and foot, took him, and went east to Bahl Shahastan.

As soon as Demetrius' brother, Antiochus, saw that Demetrius had fallen into King Arshak's hands, he himself ruled over the Syrians and Asiastan. He massed troops and went to Babylon, ten years later. News was brought [to Arshak] that Demetrius' brother, Antiochus, was ruling as king and had come to Babylon.

Arshak freed Demetrius after ten years and dispatched him to his brother to tell him what [Arshak] would do to him. However, Demetrius did not go to his brother in Babylon; rather, he went to Asiastan. Then Arshak went to Babylon with 130,000 [troops].

In the one hundred and twentieth year of his kingship, as [Arshak] neared Babylon, Antiochus fell upon him, suddenly, in summer at a narrow place. [Antiochus'] troops were unable to battle and [Arshak's forces] wiped out [Antiochus'] troops. They struck Antiochus to the ground and killed him. Then they arrested Antiochus' son, Seleucus, whom, he relates, the King had kept at court.

In that time, Arshak installed his son, called Arshak the Lesser, as king over the land of the Armenians, in the city of Mtsurn. [Arshak] designated the borders [of his son's realm]: Aruastan to the country of the Tachiks and to the country of the Syrians; Cappadocia to Cilicia, to the shore of the great Western Sea; and in the northern areas to the great Kovkas Mountain which extends through the eastern areas and to the borders of the secure land [g53] of the Medes, reaching to Zarasp Mountain and crossing through Nor Shirak.

[King Arshak the Great] sent [his son] from Mtsurn to the west with a large force of seventy thousand well-armed men and with countless grandee princes of the lords (*naxarars*) whom no one could resist in warfare. Bagarat P'ar'azean, [a descendant] of the sons of Aramenak, a great lord, came before [Arshak the Lesser] with his troops. He made an offering to him of gold and silver and adorned him in silk and vestments; he crowned

him with the ancestral crown and seated him on a throne covered with gold and inlaid with gems, and gave him his daughter as a wife.

King Arshak made him *aspet* of the land of Armenia, prince and commander, chief of the edicts [issued] for the entire realm, as well as father and brother of the king. He gave rule over that lordship [to Bagarat]. He crushed the giants who had massed against him in Syrian Mesopotamia.

Here are [the names of] the princes of the Parthians who ruled after their father, Arshak, in Bahl Shahastan in the country of the Kushans. They say that Arshak, king of the Parthians, had four sons. They say that he installed the first as king in the land of the T'etalats'ik'; the second [was placed] over the Cilicians; the third, over the Parthians; and the fourth over the land of Armenia.

[6] Arshak lived for one hundred thirty years, reigning for fifty-six years. After him his son, Arshak, ruled over the Parthians in Bahl Shahastan, in the country of the Kushans for seventy years. Then his son, Ashnash, for thirty-two years; then Arshe'n, for twenty-two years. Then Arshawir, for forty-five years; then Artashe's, for thirty-four years. Then Dareh, for thirty years; Arshak, for seventeen years; Artashir, for forty-six years; Peroz, for sixty-four years; Vagharshak, for fifty years; and then Artawan, for thirty-six years. In all, Parthian rule lasted for 553 years.

Here are the [names of] the Arsacids who ruled the country of Armenia after Arshak the Great:

Arshak, styled the Lesser, in the one hundred twenty-ninth year of the reign of his father, Arshak, ruled over the country of Armenia in the city of Mtsurn with his brother, Vagharshak, whom he made king of the land of Armenia for forty-two years. Then Arshak, for thirteen years, then Artashe's, for twenty-five years. Then Artawan and Arshawir, for twelve years. Then Arshak, son of Arshawir, for thirty-seven years, then Arshak's son, Eruand, for twenty-one years [g54]. Then Artashe's, his brother, for fifty-two years. Then Tiran, son of Artashe's, for twenty-two years. Then Tigran, his brother, for forty-two years. Then Arsham for twenty years. Then Abgar, son of Arsham, for thirty-eight years. Then Sanatruk, Abgar's sister's son, for thirty years. Then Artashe's, son of Sanatruk, for forty-nine years. Then Artawazd, then Tigran, sons of Artashe's, for twenty-three years. Then Vagharsh, son of Tigran, for twenty years. Then brave [k'aj] Xosrov, son of Vagharsh, for forty-eight years. Then Trdate's the Great, son of Xosrov, for fifty-seven years. Then Xosrov, son of Trdat, for nine years; Tiran, son of Xosrov, for forty-eight years. Then Arshak, son of Tiran, for thirty years. Shapuh, the king of Persia, for twelve years. Then Bab, son of Arshak, for seven years [g55].

Chapter 3.

[This short "chronological" section, which is a later addition from Movse's Xorenats'i and Step'anos Taronets'i, is not translated here.]

Chapter 4.

Origin of the Mamikonean Clan.

[7] ...from there the Mamikoneans, because of difficulties for [their] clan. For they are not sons of the progenitor, Aramenak; rather, they came from China (*Chenastan*) in the days of Artawan, king of the Persians, and Xosrov the Great, king of the Armenians. Such is what I heard from a great man who came as an emissary from the king of the Chenk' to King Xosrov. At the royal court I asked him: "There is a great clan in the country of Armenia which, they say, were emigrants from your land." And he replied to me: "In their songs, the minstrels (*gusank'*) of our country mention Mamik and Konak as two brave and prominent blood brothers, sons of the lord Kar'nam, who was second in the kingdom of Chenastan. After the death of this man, their king took his wife as his own wife; and he had a son from her. Now [this son], after the death of his father, succeeded in sitting on the throne

of his patrimonial kingdom. And they [Mamik and Konak], his two brothers from the same mother but not the same father, rebelled and withdrew from him. Uniting with themselves a part of the lords and the troops, they made an oath of alliance and devised a wicked plan, to kill their brother, Chenbakur, king of the land, and take over his kingdom. Mamik and Konak massed troops against him at one place in their land, and the troops of the land were divided in two. News [g56] of this reached Chenbakur, who also assembled the troops in his area, and went against them in war. They attacked each other, putting swords to work, and [Chenbakur] destroyed the rebellious troops. Fleeing, Mamik and Konak went to the Arshakuni king who sat in Bahl Shahastan in the country of the Kushans. And there was peace between those two kingdoms.

At that point, with great entreaties, Chenbakur sought them from the king of the Parthians, [saying]: "Get rid of them. Otherwise, the oath of peace between us will be dissolved." However, [the Parthian king] protected the men and did not hand them over. Instead, he wrote affectionately [to Chenbakur]: "May the oath of peace existing between us solidly endure, for I swore to them that they would not be killed. But I had them taken [to the West] to the edge of the earth, where the sun goes [home] to its mother."

Then the king of the Parthians ordered his troops to take [Mamik and Konak] with great precaution, and with their women and children and all their household to the country of the Armenians, to his relation the Arshakuni king, who was king of the country of Armenia. There they multiplied greatly and became a great clan [deriving] from Mamik and Konak. The *sparapet* comes from them.